

How To Plant Trees In The Urban Environment

City of Takoma Park Urban Forest Division "How To" Fact Sheet

Why The Concern?

Though it seems simple, planting a tree correctly requires planning and knowledge of trees and their needs. Experts estimate that young trees will grow twice as fast **when** planted correctly and will live twice as long as trees improperly set out. So it is very Important to know the basic rules **for** planting young trees.

How?

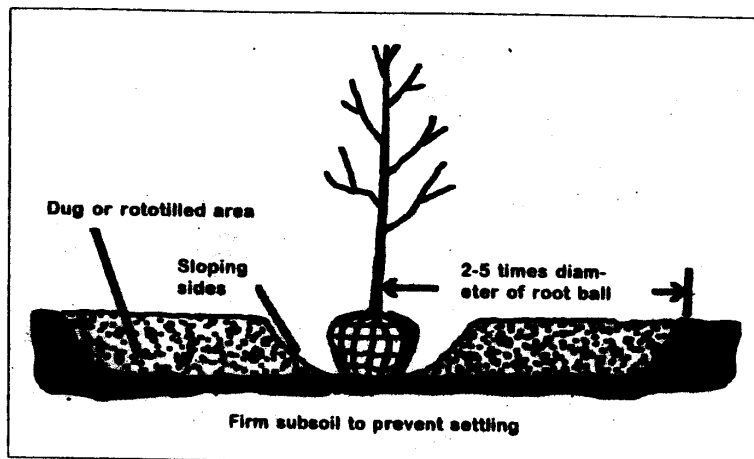
Dig a hole no deeper than the root ball of the new tree. This will help prevent the tree from ending up too deep in the soil.

Dig at least 2 times the width of the root ball, and up to 5 times the width if possible. Wide shallow holes will encourage horizontal root growth that trees and shrubs naturally produce.

Next, if you have a container grown tree, inspect the root ball and roots. If roots are circling around the root ball exterior, cut through the roots in several places. Cutting some roots helps prevent circling roots from eventually girdling the trunk.

Place the tree in the center of the hole (its upper root ball surface should be level with the existing soil) and position the tree so it is perpendicular to the ground and the main stem is growing straight up.

If you have a B&B (balled and burlapped) tree, after placing the tree in the center of the hole, remove all rope and materials from the trunk. If wire is used, pull at least 12 inches of the wire down toward the bottom of the hole. Then, cut away or pull the burlap to the bottom of the hole.



Backfill the hole with the existing soil. Organic matter can be added to the existing soil as long as it is used sparingly and is uniform throughout the area. Use care when adding organic matter to the existing soil because differences in soil pore-size can create problems with water movement and root growth between the root ball, planting hole, and surrounding soil.

After backfilling the soil, gently pack the soil to prevent major air pockets. It is a mistake to pack the soil too hard. Water can be used instead to help the soil settle and prevent overpacking.

Rake the soil even over the entire area and cover it with 2-3 inches of organic mulch, being careful not to pile the mulch against the trunk of the tree.

Water the tree and mulched area.

It is best not to stake the tree, but if wind or vandalism becomes a problem, or the tree starts to lean, support it with a flexible stake so the trunk can sway in the wind. The movement is necessary for building the trunk's strength.

Maintenance

Water the tree approximately 5 gallons per week for the first year and every other week the second year. Water slowly to avoid runoff.

Check the tree for insects. If the insects are harmful to the tree and they are present in damaging population levels, treat in a way that will not harm the beneficial insects.

Check the tree for diseases. If the disease surfaces in the first year, you probably should take the tree back to where you got it. The tree could very well have contracted the disease in the nursery.

If the tree was staked, make sure the stakes are loose so the tree can flow with the wind.

After 1 year, remove the stakes.

Common Mistakes

Setting tree too low in the hole.

Not removing the ropes, burlap, or wire baskets (from balled and burlapped trees).

Over packing the soil.

Staking when not necessary.

Using too much mulch.

Not watering enough.